

Piloting Rewards for Ecosystem Services Program Guidelines

August 2025

For more information contact Sarah Heller, sheller@farmland.org

1. Program Description

Piloting Rewards for Ecosystem Services (PRES) is a pilot program designed to improve our understanding of the impact conservation decisions have on natural resources and provide additional financial support to farmers.

This program provides farmers with an estimate of the emissions reduction impact of conservation and agroforestry practices they are implementing. PRES then rewards participants with two kinds of payments, a participation payment and an ecosystem services performance payment based on the amount of emissions reduction impact of their practices. Using models such as COMET-planner, program staff will help applicants estimate the Carbon Dioxide Equivalents sequestered by the implementation of their proposed conservation practices. If applicants are selected for funding, baseline soil carbon measurements will be collected by program staff, and these measurements will be repeated after conservation practice implementation. These soil measurements are for verification and research purposes only at this time.

PRES is not a carbon offset or carbon credit program. PRES rewards farmers for environmental stewardship and reports information about the total emissions mitigation impact of new practices back to each farm. PRES is trialing innovative approaches to how farmers are compensated for conservation. The program seeks to share information, learn and evolve over time. This program is administered by American Farmland Trust in partnership with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).

2. Eligible Participants

This program is currently open to livestock farmers. For this program, we define “farmer” as an individual, group, or organization who are intentionally raising livestock. A project may involve one or more of the following: an individual farmer, a farm family, a group of farmers with a cooperative business, or a non-profit entity.

This program recognizes the following as “livestock”: beef or dairy cattle, bison, hogs, poultry, bees, goats, sheep, waterfowl.

Eligible participants must be implementing practices for the first time on the land unit after their project has been selected for funding.

The proposed project must take place in one or more of the following counties:

Connecticut

- Fairfield County
- Hartford County
- Litchfield County
- Middlesex County
- New Haven County
- New London County
- Windham County

- Tolland County

Massachusetts

- Hampshire County
- Hampden County
- Berkshire County
- Franklin County
- Worcester County

New Hampshire

- Coos County
- Grafton County
- Sullivan County
- Cheshire County

Vermont

- Bennington County
- Caledonia County
- Essex County
- Orange County
- Windham County
- Windsor County

3. Eligible Practice List

Eligible participants must be implementing practices for the first time on the land unit after their project has been selected for funding. Eligible practices are:

- Agroforestry or silvopasture establishment
- Alley cropping (CPS 311)
- Conservation crop rotation (CPS 328)
- Conservation cover (CPS 327)
- Contour buffer strips (CPS 332)
- Cover crops (CPS 340)
- Critical area planting (CPS 342)
- Field border (CPS 386)
- Filter strip (CPS 393)
- Pasture and hay planting (CPS 512)
- Grassed waterways (CPS 412)
- Hedgerow planting (CPS 422)
- Herbaceous wind barriers (CPS 603)
- Mulching (CPS 484)
- Nutrient management (CPS 590)
- Prescribed grazing (CPS 528)

- Range planting (CPS 550)
- Residue and tillage management - no-till (CPS 329)
- Residue and tillage management - reduced till (CPS 345)
- Riparian forest buffer (CPS 391)
- Riparian herbaceous cover (CPS 390)
- Stripcropping (CPS 585)
- Silvopasture (CPS 381)
- Tree/shrub establishment (CPS 612)
- Vegetative barriers (CPS 601)
- Windbreak/shelterbelt establishment (CPS 380)

For more information on the eligible practices, see [NRCS conservation practice standards](#).

4. Timeline and Participation Process

Applications will be accepted from September 1 – September 26, 2025.

After an application has been submitted, selected applicants will be contacted by AFT staff to create a [COMET Planner](#) report. COMET-Planner is an evaluation tool that provides generalized estimates of the greenhouse gas impacts of conservation practices. The applicant will need to provide information about the conservation practices they plan to implement, such as number of acres, irrigation status, type of fertilizer, etc. This information will be put into COMET Planner by AFT staff, and the resulting report will be used to calculate the award amount.

Awardees will be notified about the status of their application by November 30th, 2025. AFT staff will initiate payment of the one-time enrollment incentive of \$1,000, as well as payment based on half of the modeled carbon to be sequestered by the proposed project at \$40/ton/acre once a signed award letter has been received.

Program staff will take initial soil carbon measurements by spring of 2026. This program measures changes in soil carbon through direct soil testing as a complement to the modeled changes. Soil testing results are for informational purposes only and will not impact payments. AFT Program staff will work with the applicant to determine a soil carbon sampling plan for their proposed project to measure the change in soil carbon over the project timeline. Sampling will occur in the first and last year of the contract/project. Depending on the complexity of the project a stratified subsample of field locations will be selected for sampling based on soil type and management history. We expect that 3 to 10 sampling locations will be selected for soil carbon monitoring at each farm. AFT field staff will arrange a date to collect soil samples that aligns with each farm's field management schedule. The soil carbon data that is collected will be shared with the farmer, and will only be used by AFT in an anonymized format unless express permission is granted by the farmer.

Conservation practice implementation is expected to begin by spring of 2026. Awardees are expected to verify practice implementation with program staff. Though no formal documentation is required, awardees can expect contact from program staff to verify practice implementation near to the proposed installation dates.

The remaining payment for the modeled carbon sequestration will be paid in fall of 2026, contingent on conservation practice implementation.